**Movement Work in Process-oriented Psychology**

**by Amy Mindell**

September 1995

Imagine a woman who sat down and said that she felt unfocused and overwhelmed. She was having many troubles in her life, at work, and in her relationships. She was sitting a bit slumped over and was shaking her head from side to side and said she was depressed and unable to manage what was happening to her. In a fleeting moment however, she picked up a little piece of paper which was on the ground, aimed very exactly at the garbage can which was a few feet away and tossed the paper in it. I was struck by her sudden intense focus and the linear, direct movement of her arm as she threw the paper.

When I encouraged her to focus on this motion, she was a bit shy, giggled but curious to find out more about this unusual movement. She experimented taking great aim, and quickly and exactly threw the paper in the basket once again. I asked her to stand up and try the movement again, this time, without the paper. She used her arm and then began to use her whole body in this linear motion as she lunged toward the floor, appeared to pick something up and threw her hand intently toward the basket. She began to enjoy her movement but stopped sheepishly, as if she had done something wrong. What happened I asked? She said "I don't know what I'm doing. It feels great but could it be helpful?" I told her that if she could follow this motion just a bit longer we might discover something important for her.

As she continued to move, I asked her to make a face which would go along with her movements. She scrunched her brow and her eyes looked sharply in the direction her arms were moving. I then asked her if she could make a picture of what she was doing. She said "I see a great goddess who goes right to the heart of the matter and then leaves quickly!" She moved all over the room, as a great warrior with her chest out, head held high, and in a concentrated exact way as well as making punctuating sounds which accompanied this movement. Together we developed a warrior's creative dance and song as we swooped down to the ground, turned and threw our arms in many direction. I asked the "warrior" how she might deal with this woman's everyday problems. She said, "I would be very exact, clear and detached! Wow, it could even be fun!"

This is one example of a woman who unfolded her process through the tools of process-oriented psychology. The woman is not a dancer, but by focusing on her spontaneous motions and allowing them to unfold she discovers a creative dance and new attitudes toward her life.

**Process Work**

Process-oriented psychology, commonly called 'process work', was developed by my partner Arny Mindell in Switzerland. Process work is a new form of psychotherapy whose core is based on the ancient knowledge of Taoism and the inherent wisdom of nature. It respects the known and understandable world while delving deeper into the mysterious, dreamlike and unknown dimensions of life. Its application ranges from working with people in near death and comatose states to group and political work, relationship work, movement and bodywork, meditation, and art work. Process work reveals that the seeds of solutions and great sources of creativity are found just in those places we least expect it: in our most difficult problems, spontaneous movements, dreams and relationship difficulties.

Movement in the most general sense is the core of process work because the term process means the flow of experience, the movement which is inherent in life and nature. Like the Taoists who spent their lives studying and adjusting to the on-going transformations in nature, the process worker notices and joins the river of our experiences and assists nature in its unfolding. Whether focusing on a body symptom, dream, movement, relationship conflict, a group interaction or an extreme state of consciousness, the process worker asks, "What is moving? What is changing?" and attempts to follow nature's winding path.

**States and Processes**

A process orientation towards life contrasts with a state-oriented view of life. A static view of life tends to label experiences with names which are only momentarily applicable. Such names as "pain", "relationship trouble", "movement difficulties", or in the case above, "throwing something away" are only the beginning descriptions of dynamic processes which are in the process of unfolding. Once we tap into and follow the movement inside of these seemingly static experiences we discover fluid and creative processes. Like Buddhists and all movement-oriented people, process workers understand events by getting into the stream of experience rather than analyzing and understanding it from the outside. Most importantly, process work focuses on the creative spark behind our individual, couple or group experiences.

**Perception and Channels**

When I went to Zurich in 1980, I had been trained in dance and was looking for a way to work with people with movement which delved deeply into each person's individual nature and creativity. I absolutely loved dance, but felt that I was a bit stuck in my movement repertoire. Process work afforded me a vocabularly to understand my movement processes and go beyond my own perceptoral movement boundaries.

Let me speak generally about process theory and then specifically about movement.

Process work focuses on what we perceive and differentiates perception in two specific ways. First, it notices that we perceive information as it manifests through various sensory-oriented channels. Movement is one of these basic channels in which our process manifests. We also perceive signals manifesting visually in visions, dreams, and hallucinations; auditorally in outer and inner sounds or voices, proprioceptively in inner body feelings; and in relationships and worldly issues which take hold of our attention.

We also notice that some of these experiences are closer to our awareness or momentary identity (primary process) and others are farther away from our momentary identity or awareness (secondary process). In the example of the warrior woman, we notice that her primary intention was to focus on her problems and difficulties and feeling incapable of dealing with these issues. Secondarily, we discovered the great preciion of the warrior.

Process work opens up to and embraces unintentional, secondary experiences as the seeds of new life and helps them unfold through amplification. Amplification means strengthening a signal in its particular channel in order to bring out its full message. The woman amplified her movement first by putting her focus on it, translating her hand motion to her whole body, making a face which mirrored this movement and creating a dance. Finally, processes can be unfolded by adding on more channels in order to help experinces to unfold. In this example, I asked the woman to make an image of her movements and then she began to make sounds which mirrored her process as well.

**Differentiating Movement**

Process work differentiates movement into primary movements and secondary movements. Primary movements are intentional and congruent with our momentary identity. We understand them, they make sense to us. In the example of the warrior woman, we would say that slumping in her chair and nodding her head were primary movements which mirrored her primary process of unhappiness and feeling unable to manage her life.

Secondary movements are unintentional, spontaneous and incongruent with our primary identity. These secondary movements are dream-like communications which are mysterious, unknown, and surprising. They do not complete themselves, and we do not readily understand them. Secondary movements are like the begining of a sentence which stops in mid-air! They have a tendency to repeat themselves until we notice them and help them unfold. A secondary movement in this woman's process was the moment when she aimed and threw the piece of paper in the garbage can. Her precise motions did not go along with her momentary identity.

It is not easy to recognize these unintentional movements and stay with them although this is one of the goals of improvisational and creative dance. Unintentional movements can happen very rapidly like a quick stumble, a shrug of the shoulders, or a movement tic. It is all too easy to fool ourselves and focus on those aspects of our movements which we like or favor and to ignore or simply not notice those aspects which we do not understand, or those which are distasteful, fleeting, unknown, unintentional and which lie outside of our momentary identity. While we are moving, for example, we might get attached to moving in a certain way and ignore seoncdray movements which momentarily disrut our primary movement floow. Catching primary and secondary movements when they occur while we are speaking, or when we are moving, and focusing on them with awareness not only leads to creativity but can also minimize movement injuries. We have found that secondary processes have a tendency to amplify and repeat themselves in order to be known. Therefore, the signals of movement injuries may have made themselves known in earlier secondary signals which were not noticed.

**The Edge**

Central to a process-oriented movement awareness is the ability to notice movement "edges". The edge is the boundary between primary and secondary processes. It appears when something new arises and we are confronted with the boundaries of our known world.

The edge appears in movement when we begin to explore a secondary movement and suddenly stop, become confused, giggle, or doubt the value of our experience. Remember the woman in the example? She stopped at one moment, became shy and doubted her experience. She was perched at the edge of something new, something unknown. All of our fears, excitement and beliefs which forbid us from exploring new territory arise at the edge. But, watch the flow of process! At other times, it might be necessary to go more deeply into the belie systems or figures who stop us from xpanding our identity.

If you find yourself cycling in your movement, or feel bored, you might check out if you missed an edge. At this point you might ask yourself "Where was the last point of energy?" The answer to this question may lead you right back to the moment when something secondary appeared but was let go of.

The edge can be very illusive. I remember watching two women moving together in a very fluid way. They faced one another, palms together, and rocked back and forth. This was their primary movement process. As they moved, however there were very slight pushes with the hands which were incongruent with the rhythm and force of the rest of their movement. They had edges to notice and explore these momentarily incongruent signals. When encouraged to follow this push, they began to wrestle, challenged one another and enjoyed feeling their strength. Following secondary material requires encouragement and an attitude of compassion to all the different parts of ourselves.

**The Dreambody**

Let's return to the development of process work and the connection between movement and body symptoms.

Arny made a fascinating discovery many years ago. At that time, he was a Jungian analyst in Zurich, Switzerland and believed very strongly in Jung's idea that our dreams are meaningful expressions of our inner lives. Jung approached dreams like a medieval alchemist. He took the dream, (the alchemists would call it 'prima materia') focused on it (or put it in a pot so to speak) and with appreciation and dedication cooked the contents until they instructed us about our lives (turned to gold!). Arny wondered if the same attitude could also be applied to body symptoms. What would it be like to follow body experiences as if they were potentially meaningful?

During that time, Arny had a client who was dying of stomach cancer. After an operation, and while still under partial anesthesia, the man told Arny in an excited, almost elated tone that his tumor was still growing. Though Arny reassured the man that his tumor had just been removed, the man insisted that it was still growing and began to make movements that pushed out and expanded his stomach. Wanting to validate this man's experience, yet worried that continuing this movement might burst the man's stitches, Arny encouraged him to change sensory-oriented channels by translating this movement experience into a visual picture.

The man said that he saw a picture of fireworks and suddenly said, "Oh, but that is what I dreamed the other night! I dreamed that there was an explosion of fireworks on independence day and that that would be my healing!" In other words, the experience he had in his body was mirrored in his dream! This man was ordinarily quite shy. Arny helped him to explode and have fun in many parts of his life. He lived much longer than expected and had a lot of fun. (See Arny's Working with the Dreaming Body, 1984). From this experience and countless others, Arny developed the concept of the dreambody: the idea that our body experiences mirror our night-time dreams.

In fact, this example shows that we do not only dream at night but that our bodies are dreaming all of the time in our sometimes disturbing, mysterious and unintentional secondary body signals and movements. We need only notice and tap into these experiences throughout the day and help them unfold in order to tap into this on-going dreaming process. Life becomes a rich, ever-transforming adventure!

**The Neglected Channel**

The movement channel is frequently neglected in western cultures. Many people, particularly european-americans, have been raised to structure and temper their movement. And even for some of us trained in movement, it may be unusual to learn to use our awareness to follow unintentional movement processes. Many people learn to walk and move properly, but not to follow their unique, mysterious, often unpredictable movement signals.

There are numerous examples which I could give from our process-oriented movement clinics on the Oregon coast (led by Kate Jobe, Nisha Zenoff, Arny and myself) or the Lava Rock body Symptoms Clinics (led by Arny, Max Schuepbach and staff) on the Oregon coast This particular example occured during a body symptoms clinic. The difference between "learned" and "spontaneous" movement was apparent in this work with a woman with cerebral palsy.

The woman said that she had cerebral palsy from birth. She also said that she was interested in a childhood dream she had had in which she was with her family in a castle and everyone was having a really happy and fun time together. (Arny's research has shown that childhood dreams are connected to life myths and chronic symptoms)

She continued to explain that in order to move somewhere, she said that she must first concentrate very exactly on where she wants to go and only after this she begins to move in that direction. She said that this sort of concentration is very tiring but that nevertheless this is the way she had learned to get through life. This is her primary way of moving, her intention and means of getting along with her movement process.

In order to stay close to her physical movement process, and through this, hopefully find out more about her dream, Arny asked her how she would move if she were not to concentrate but allowed her body to move naturally. He was asking about her secondary movement experience. The woman was excited to find out what would happen but afraid that she might fall. Arny encouraged her to sit on the floor and to experiment from this safe postion.

She sat down, closed her eyes, and followed her natural movement tendencies. She began to sway back and forth, and started to crawl sideways across the floor. She then wanted to try this same movement standing up. Others from the seminar stood around her in case she would lose her balance. Her motion began to transform as she moved with a kind of rhythmic lilt. She began to laugh and laugh. She said "Oh, this is so much fun! It is so easy! I don't have to work hard!"

Encouraged to allow the movement to unfold further, her fingers began to snap, her head bobbed back and forth, and she started to hum a jazz tune. She danced freely and gloriously. The rest of the group spontaneously started to sing and celebrate and joined her in her dance! She said it was like being with a happy family and suddenly recalled her childhood dream!

Following the dreaming process in movement we connect to this woman's earliest childhood dream, creativity, music, her connection to other people and her natural movement process.

**Quick Access through Movement to the Dreaming Process**

Interestingly enough, we have found that just because movement is far from awarenes for many people, it is a very quick access to the dreaming process for it is just in those places that we have least awareness that the dreaming process comes up most rapidly. By simply asking someone to walk around the room and to notice the movements she or he is making which are "not simply walking" is the beginning of unfolding the dreaming process!

I remember an elderly professional man who was the head of social agency and had developed programs in many places around the world. As he talked about his work he glowed. He had decided, however, that it was time for him to retire. He complained that he had weakness in his left leg. He had already explored and taken care of the medical causes for this weakness and was interested in finding out more about it.

Arny and I asked him if he would walk around the room and notice if there was anything in him that "wasn't just walking." As he did this he noticed that his left leg was slower in recovering its step than his right. With our encouragement the man slightly amplified or exaggerated the slowness of this leg. He focused intensly on his experience as if in meditation.

He bent even further down on his left knee and then stepped up to his right. He suddenly walked over to one of the seminar participants, bent down all the way to the ground and bowed his head. He repeated this motion several times until he knew why he was bowing. He finally said "I am giving respect, I am a servant." He continued "Wow, I thought I should retire because of my age, but actually I am excited about going back to work and doing more for people and the world!"

This man's movement experience was not only pathological but a meaningful aspect of his process. By asking him to walk around the room and amplify the weakness in his leg, he discovered his desire to continue in his role as a servant of the people.

**Movement and Coma Work**

As process work began to develop and as a school began in Zurich, Switzerland and Portland, Oregon, it branched out into many areas. But one area which has been most significant in my life has been the work with people in comatose states. Movement and other forms of nonverbal communication are so important in coma work because people in these altered states of consciousness do not relate in ordinary verbal ways. Process workers enter into the individual's communication system, by noticing even the most minute movements, following and helping them unfold.

We have seen a slight lean of the head to one side, when amplified and encouraged become a child asking to be nurtured, the motions of the arms become an eternal lover, the heaving and coughing of the chest turn into singing a children's song. Special methods must be used in order to communicate nonverbally, being very conscious of nonverbal feedback including sounds, movement and body sensations. (For more on process work with near death and comatose states see Arny's Coma: Key to Awakening, Shambhala 1988, Penguin-Arkana 1994.)

**Conclusion**

Process oriented movement awareness requires the meditative ability to notice intentional movements as well as unintentional movements and movement edges. As we allow our secondary movement to unfold through amplification and channel changing we tap into our on-going dreaming process and our creativity at any time of the day.

**References:**

Mindell, Amy. Metaskills: The Feeling Art of Therapy. Tempe, AZ: New Falcon Press, (to come) 1995.

Mindell, Amy & Arnold . Riding the Horse Backwards: Process Oriented Theory and Practice. London: Penguin/Arkana, 1992

Mindell, Arnold . Working with the Dreaming Body. London: Penguin/Arkana,

Mindell, Arnold. The Dreambody in Relationships. London: Penguin/Arkana,

Mindell, Arnold. Working on Yourself Alone. London: Penguin/Arkana, 1990.

Mindell, Arnold. Coma: Key to Awakening. Boulder: Shambhala, 1989.

Mindell, Arnold. The Shaman's Body. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993.